The Metamorphosis

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Chapter I

AS GREGOR SAMSA AWOKE from unsettling dreams one morning, he found himself transformed in his bed into a monstrous vermin. 1 He lay on his hard armorlike back and when he raised his head a little he saw his vaulted brown belly divided into sections by stiff arches from whose height the coverlet had already slipped and was about to slide off completely. His many legs, which were pathetically thin compared to the rest of his bulk, flickered helplessly before his eyes.

“What has happened to me?” he thought. It was no dream. His room, a regular human bedroom, if a little small, lay quiet between the four familiar walls. Above the desk, on which a collection of fabric samples was unpacked and spread out—Samsa was a traveling salesman—hung the picture that he had recently cut out of an illustrated magazine and put in a pretty gilt frame. It showed a lady, sitting upright, dressed in a fur hat and fur boa; her entire forearm had vanished into a thick fur muff which she held out to the viewer.

Gregor’s gaze then shifted to the window, and the dreary weather—raindrops could be heard beating against the metal ledge of the window—made him quite melancholy. “What if I went back to sleep for a while and forgot all this foolishness,” he thought. However, this was totally impracticable, as he habitually slept on his right side, a position he could not get into in his present state; no matter how forcefully he heaved himself to the right, he rocked onto his back again. He must have tried it a hundred times, closing his eyes so as not to see his twitching legs, and stopped only when he felt a faint, dull ache start in his side, a pain which he had never experienced before.

“Oh God,” he thought, “what a grueling profession I picked! Traveling day in, day out. It is much more aggravating work than the actual business done at the home office, and then with the strain of constant travel as well: the worry over train connections, the bad and irregular meals, the steady stream of faces who never become anything closer than acquaintances. The Devil take it all!” He felt a slight itching up on his belly and inched on his back closer to the bedpost to better lift his head. He located the itching spot,

which was surrounded by many tiny white dots that were incomprehensible to him, and tried to probe the area with one of his legs but immediately drew it back, for the touch sent an icy shiver through him.

He slid back into his former position. “This getting up so early,” he thought, “makes you totally stupid. A man needs sleep. Other traveling salesmen live like harem women. For example, when I come back to the hotel late in the morning to write up the new orders, these men are still sitting at breakfast. I should try that with my boss. I would be thrown out on the spot. Who knows, however, if that wouldn’t be for the best. If I were not holding back because of my parents, I would have quit long ago. I would go up to the boss and tell him my heartfelt opinion. He would be knocked off the desk. This too is a strange way to do things: He sits on top of the desk and from this height addresses the employees, who must step up very close because of the boss’s deafness. Well, I have not entirely given up hope, and as soon as I have saved the money to pay off the debt my parents owe him—it might still be another five

or six years—I'll definitely do it. Then I'll cut myself free. For the time being, however, I must get up because my train leaves at five."

And he looked at the alarm clock ticking on the bureau. "God Almighty!" he thought. It was half past six and the hands were steadily advancing, actually past the half hour and already closer to three quarters past. Did the alarm not ring? One could see from the bed that it was correctly set for four o'clock and so it must have gone off. Yes, but was it possible to sleep through that furniture-rattling ringing? Well, he hadn't slept peacefully but probably all the sounder for it. But what should he do now? The next train left at seven o'clock, and in order to catch it he would have to rush around like mad, and the sample collection was still unpacked and he was not feeling particularly fresh and energetic. And even if he caught the train, a bawling out from the boss was inescapable, because the office messenger had arrived by the five o'clock train and reported his absence long ago; he was the boss's creature, mindless and spineless. What if Gregor reported in sick? This would be extremely painful and suspicious, as he had not once been ill during his five-year employment. The boss would certainly come

over with the health insurance doctor, reproach the parents for their lazy son, and cut off all excuses by referring to the health insurance doctor, for whom there were only healthy but work-shy people. And would he be so wrong in this case? Actually Gregor felt perfectly well, apart from a drowsiness that was superfluous after so long a sleep; in fact he even had a great appetite.

As he urgently considered all this, without being able to decide to get out of bed—the alarm clock struck a quarter to seven—there was a timid knock at the door by his head. “Gregor,” a voice called —it was the mother—“it’s a quarter to seven. Didn’t you want to get going?” That sweet voice! Gregor was shocked when he heard his voice answering, unmistakably his own, true, but a voice in which, as if from below, a persistent chirping intruded, so that the words remained clearly shaped only for a moment and then were destroyed to such an extent that one could not be sure one had heard them right. Gregor wanted to answer thoroughly and explain everything, but restricted himself, given the circumstances, to saying: “Yes, yes, thank you, Mother, I’m just getting up.” Due to the wooden door, the change in Gregor’s voice was probably not

apparent on the other side, for the mother contented herself with this explanation and shuffled away. However, this short conversation brought to the attention of the other family members that Gregor, quite unexpectedly, was still at home, and the father was already knocking, gently, but with his fist, on one of the side doors. “Gregor, Gregor,” he called, “what is the matter?” And after a little while he called again, in a louder, warning voice: “Gregor, Gregor!” At the other side door the sister softly pleaded: “Gregor? Aren’t you feeling well? Do you need anything?” To both doors Gregor answered: “I’m all ready,” and strove, through enunciating most carefully and inserting long pauses between each word, to keep anything conspicuous out of his voice. The father went back to his breakfast, but the sister whispered: “Gregor, open up, I beg you.” Gregor, however, had no intention whatsoever of opening the door and instead congratulated himself on the precaution he picked up while traveling of locking the doors at night, even at home.

All he wanted to do now was to get up quietly and undisturbed, get dressed, and, most important, eat breakfast, and only then consider what to do next, because, as he was well aware, in bed he could

never think anything through to a reasonable conclusion. He recalled how he had often felt slight pains in bed, perhaps due to lying in an awkward position, pains that proved imaginary when he got up, and he was eager to see how today's illusion would gradually dissolve. He had no doubt that the change in his voice was nothing more than the presentiment of a severe cold, an ailment common among traveling salesmen.

The coverlet was easy to throw off; he needed only to puff himself up and it fell off by itself. But then things became much more difficult, especially since he was excessively wide. He would have needed arms and hands to prop himself up, instead of which he had only the many little legs that continually waved every which way and which he could not control at all. If he wanted to bend one, it was the first to stretch itself out, and if he finally succeeded in getting this leg to do what he wanted, the others in the meantime, as if set free, waved all the more wildly in painful and frenzied agitation. "There's no use staying in bed," Gregor said to himself.

First he attempted to get the lower part of his body out of bed, but this lower part, which he had not yet seen and about which he

could form no clear picture, proved too onerous to move. It shifted so slowly, and when he had finally become nearly frantic, he gathered his energy and lunged forward, without restraint, in the wrong direction and so slammed against the lower bedpost; the searing pain that shot through his body informed him that the lower part of his body was perhaps the most sensitive at present.

He then tried to get the top part of his body out first, and cautiously moved his head toward the edge of the bed. This went smoothly enough, and despite its girth and mass the bulk of his body slowly followed the direction of his head. But when he finally got his head free over the bedside, he became leery of continuing in this vein, because if he fell it would be a miracle if he did not hurt his head. And he must not, especially now, lose consciousness at any price; better to stay in bed.

But when he had repeated his former efforts and once more lay sighing and watching his puny legs struggle against each other, possibly even more viciously, and had found no way to bring peace and order to this random motion, he again told himself that he could not possibly stay in bed and that the logical recourse was to

risk everything in the mere hope of freeing himself from the bed. But at the same time he did not forget to remind himself periodically that better than rash decisions was cool, indeed the very coolest, deliberation. In these moments, he fixed his gaze as firmly as possible on the window, but unfortunately the sight of the morning fog, which had even obscured the other side of the narrow street, offered little in the way of cheer or encouragement. “Seven o’clock already,” he said to himself at the new chiming of the alarm clock, “seven o’clock already and still such thick fog.” And for a little while he lay still, breathing lightly as if he expected total repose would restore everything to its normal and unquestionable state.

But then he said to himself: “Before a quarter past seven I absolutely must be out of bed. Besides, by that time someone from the office will have come to ask about me, because the office opens before seven o’clock.” And now he began rocking the whole length of his body in a steady rhythm in order to pitch it out of the bed. If he dropped from the bed in this way, he could probably protect his head by lifting it sharply as he fell. His back seemed to be hard, so

it would not be harmed by the fall to the carpet. His greatest concern was for the loud crash he was likely to make, provoking fear if not terror behind all the doors. Still, it must be risked.

When Gregor was sticking halfway out of the bed—the new method was less a struggle than a game, he had only to inch along by rocking back and forth—it struck him how much easier it would be if someone came to help. Two strong people—he thought of his father and the maid—would surely suffice: They would only have to slip their arms under his curved back to lift him from the bed, bend down with their burden, and be patient and watchful while he engineered his swing over to the floor, where he hoped his tiny legs would find some purpose. Now, putting aside the fact that all the doors were locked, should he really call for help? Despite his predicament, he could not suppress a smile at these thoughts.

He was already out so far that he could barely keep his balance while vigorously rocking, and very soon he would have to decide one way or the other, because in five minutes it would be a quarter past seven—then the doorbell rang. “That’s someone from the office,” he said to himself, and slightly stiffened although his legs

only danced more wildly. Everything was still for a moment. “They’re not going to answer,” Gregor said to himself, clinging to some absurd hope. But then of course the maid marched sharply to the door as usual and opened it. Gregor needed only to hear the visitor’s first words of greeting to know who it was—the head clerk himself. Why was Gregor condemned to serve at a firm where the smallest infraction was seized upon with the gravest suspicion; was each and every employee a scoundrel; was there no loyal and dedicated man serving them who, having spent several hours of the morning not devoted to the firm, might become so overcome by pangs of remorse as to be actually unable to get out of bed? Would it not have been enough to send an apprentice to inquire—if any inquiry were actually necessary; did the head clerk himself have to come, and did the whole innocent family have to be shown that only the head clerk could be entrusted to investigate this suspicious matter? And owing more to the anxiety these thoughts caused Gregor than to any real decision, he swung himself with all his might out of the bed. There was a loud thud but not really a crash. The fall was broken somewhat by the carpet, and his back was more flexible than Gregor had thought, so there resulted only a

relatively unobtrusive thump. However, he had not been careful enough about raising his head and had banged it; he twisted it and rubbed it against the carpet in pain and aggravation.

“Something fell in there,” said the head clerk in the adjoining room to the left. Gregor tried to imagine whether something similar to what had happened to him today might one day befall the head clerk; the possibility really had to be granted. But as if in rude reply to the question, the head clerk now took a few decisive steps in the next room, which caused his patent leather boots to creak. From the room to the right the sister informed Gregor in a whisper: “The head clerk is here.” “I know,” Gregor said to himself, not daring to raise his voice loud enough for his sister to hear.

“Gregor,” the father said, now from the room on the left, “the head clerk has come and wants to know why you did not catch the early train. We don’t know what to tell him. Besides, he wants to speak to you personally, so please open the door. He would surely be so kind as to excuse the untidiness of the room.” “Good morning, Mr. Samsa,” the head clerk was calling out amiably. “He is not well,” said the mother to the head clerk while the father was still

speaking through the door, “he’s not well, sir, believe me. Why else would Gregor miss a train! All that the boy thinks about is work. It almost makes me mad the way he never goes out in the evening; he’s been in the city eight days now, but he’s been at home every night. He sits with us at the table quietly reading the paper or studying train schedules. His only amusement is busying himself with his fretsaw. For example, he spent two or three evenings carving a small frame, you’d be amazed how pretty it is, he hung it in his room, you’ll see it as soon as Gregor opens up. I’m glad, sir, that you are here; we would never have gotten Gregor to open the door ourselves, he’s so stubborn and he’s certainly not well even though he denied it this morning.” “I’m just coming,” said Gregor slowly and carefully, not moving so as not to miss one word of the conversation. “I can’t think of any other explanation, madam,” said the head clerk; “I hope it’s nothing serious. On the other hand I must say we businessmen—fortunately or unfortunately, as you will —are often obliged to simply overcome a slight indisposition to tend to business.” “So can the head clerk come in now?” asked the impatient father, knocking on the door again. “No,” said Gregor.

The room on the left fell into an uncomfortable silence, the sister began sobbing in the room on the right.

Why did the sister not join the others? She had probably just gotten out of bed and had not yet begun to dress. And why was she crying? Because he would not get up and let the head clerk in, because he was in danger of losing his job, because the boss would again start hounding Gregor's parents for their old debts? These were surely unnecessary worries at the moment. Gregor was still here and would not think of deserting his family. Of course, he was currently lying on the carpet and no one who knew of his condition could seriously expect that he would admit the head clerk. This petty discourtesy, for which a suitable explanation could easily be found later, could hardly be grounds for Gregor's immediate dismissal. And it seemed to Gregor that it would be more reasonable if they were now to leave him in peace instead of bothering him with their crying and pleading. But the others were obviously distressed by the uncertainty, and this excused their behavior.

"Mr. Samsa," the head clerk now called, raising his voice, "what is the matter? You are barricading yourself in your room, giving only

yes and no answers, causing your parents serious and unnecessary concern, and neglecting —I just mention this in passing—your professional responsibilities in an outrageous manner. I am speaking here in the name of your parents and your boss, and I seriously beg you to give a clear and immediate explanation. I am astonished, just astonished. I have always known you to be a quiet, reasonable man and now you suddenly seem to be indulging in rash eccentricities. The Chief did point out a possible explanation for your absence early today— concerning the cash payments that were recently entrusted to you—but in fact I practically gave him my word of honor that this could not be the true explanation. Now, however, I see your incredible obstinacy and have completely lost any desire to intercede on your behalf. And your position is by no means unassailable. I originally intended to speak with you privately, but since you are pointlessly wasting my time, I see no reason why your good parents shouldn’t also hear. Your recent performance has been highly unsatisfactory; it is admittedly not a heavy business season, but a season of no business at all, I assure you, Mr. Samsa, does not exist, cannot exist.”

“But, sir,” cried Gregor, beside himself and forgetting all else in his agitation, “I’ll open the door immediately, this instant. A slight indisposition, a spell of dizziness prevented me from getting up. I’m still lying in bed. But now I am feeling completely refreshed. I’m just getting out of bed. Please be patient a moment! I’m not as well as I thought. But really I’m all right. These things can just wipe you out so suddenly. Only last night I felt fine, my parents can tell you, or actually last night I already had some sign of it. They must have noticed it. Oh, why did I not report it at the office! But one always thinks that one will overcome an illness without staying home. Sir, please spare my parents! There are no grounds to the accusations you’ve just made against me, no one has said so much as a word about them to me. Perhaps you haven’t seen the latest orders I sent in. In any event, I will be on the eight o’clock train. I’ve been invigorated by these few hours of rest. Don’t let me keep you further, sir, I’ll be in the office myself immediately. Please be good enough to tell them and convey my respects to the Chief!”

And while Gregor blurted all this out, hardly knowing what he said, he had easily, probably due to the exercise he had had in bed,

reached the bureau and was now trying to pull himself upright against it. He actually wanted to open the door, to actually show himself and speak to the head clerk; he was eager to find out what the others, who so desired to see him now, would say at the sight of him. If they were shocked, then Gregor was no longer responsible and could be calm. But if they accepted everything calmly, then he too had no reason to get worked up and could, if he rushed, actually be at the train station by eight o’clock. At first he kept sliding off the smooth bureau but finally gave himself a last powerful push and stood upright; he no longer paid attention to the pains in his lower abdomen, however burning. He then let himself fall against the back of a nearby chair, his little legs clinging to the edges. In this way he also managed to gain control of himself and fell silent, as he could now listen to the head clerk.

“Did you understand even a word?” the head clerk asked the parents. “He isn’t making fools of us?” “For God’s sake,” cried the mother, already weeping, “maybe he is seriously ill and we’re tormenting him. Grete! Grete!” she then screamed. “Mother?” called the sister from the other side. They were communicating

across Gregor’s room. “You must go for the doctor immediately. Gregor is sick. Run for the doctor. Did you just hear Gregor speak?” “That was the voice of an animal,” said the head clerk, in a noticeably low tone compared to the mother’s shrieking. “Anna! Anna!” yelled the father through the foyer to the kitchen, clapping his hands, “go get a locksmith at once!” And already the two girls were running through the foyer with a rustling of skirts—how had the sister dressed so quickly?—and throwing open the house door. The door could not be heard closing; they must have left it open as is usual in houses visited by great misfortune. 3

Gregor had become much calmer however. Apparently his words were no longer understandable even though they were clear enough to him, clearer than before, perhaps because his ear had become accustomed to their sound. But at least it was now believed that all was not right with him and they were ready to help him. He felt cheered by the confidence and surety with which the first orders were met. He felt encircled by humanity again and he expected great and miraculous results from both the doctor and the locksmith, without truly distinguishing between them. In order to

have the clearest voice possible for the decisive conversations to come, he coughed a little, taking pains to stifle the sound, as it may not have sounded like a human cough and he could no longer trust his own judgment about it. Meanwhile in the adjoining room it had become completely still. Maybe the parents were sitting at the table whispering with the head clerk, or maybe they were all leaning against the door, listening.

With the aid of the chair, Gregor slowly pushed himself to the door, then let go and threw himself against it and held himself upright—the pads of his little legs were slightly sticky—and rested there for a moment from his exertions. He then attempted to unlock it by taking the key into his mouth. Unfortunately he appeared to have no teeth—how then should he grasp the key?—but on the other hand his jaws were certainly very powerful, and with their help he got the key to move, ignoring the fact that he was somehow harming himself, because a brown fluid had come from his mouth, oozed over the key, and dripped onto the floor. “Do you hear that,” said the head clerk in the next room, “he’s turning the key.” This was a great encouragement to Gregor, but they should all, the

mother and father too, have shouted: “Go, Gregor,” they should have shouted: “Keep going, keep going with that lock!” And imagining that they were intently following his every move, he obliviously clenched the key in his jaws with all the strength he could muster. In accordance with the progress of the key, he danced around the lock, holding himself up only by his mouth, and as needed he either hung on to the key or pressed his whole weight down against it. It was the sharp click of the lock finally snapping back that abruptly roused him. Breathing a sigh of relief, he said to himself: “So I didn’t need the locksmith after all,” and pressed his head against the handle in order to completely open the door.

Since he had to pull the door open in this way, it was opened quite wide while he himself still could not be seen. He first had to slowly circumnavigate one of the double doors and do it very carefully so as not to flop onto his back before entering the room. He was still busy with this involved maneuver and had no time to be distracted by anything else when he heard the head clerk burst out with a loud “Oh!”—it sounded like a gust of wind—and now he also saw the head clerk, standing closest to the door, pressing his hand

against his open mouth and backing away slowly as if repelled by an invisible and relentless force. 4 The mother—standing there, despite the presence of the head clerk, with her hair still undone and bristling all over—first looked at the father with clasped hands, then took two steps toward Gregor and fell down amid her billowing skirts, her face sinking out of sight onto her breast. The father, furiously shaking his fists as if willing Gregor to go back in his room, looked uncertainly around the living room, covered his eyes in his hands, and sobbed with great heaves of his powerful chest.

Gregor did not now enter the room but instead leaned against the other, firmly locked wing of the door so that only half of his body could be seen and his head above it, tilting as he peered out at the others. In the meantime it had grown much brighter; a section of the endless dark gray building across the street was clearly visible —it was a hospital, with regular windows breaking through the matte façade; the rain was still falling but now only in large individually formed and visible drops that struck the ground one at a time. The many breakfast dishes lay on the table, as breakfast

was the most important meal of the day for the father, the time when he would pore over the different newspapers for hours. On the wall just opposite hung a photograph of Gregor from the time of his military service, showing him as a lieutenant and, with a carefree smile and his hand on his sword, demanding respect for his bearing and uniform. The door to the foyer was open, and since the apartment door was also open, one could see out to the landing and the top of the stairs leading down.

“Well now,” said Gregor, well aware that he alone had remained calm, “I will get dressed immediately, pack my samples, and be on my way. Will you all, will you let me go catch my train? Now you see, sir, I’m not stubborn and I’m happy to work; traveling is difficult but I couldn’t live without it. Where are you going, sir? To the office? Yes? Will you report on everything truthfully? A man can suddenly be incapable of working, but this is the precise moment to remember his past performance and to consider that later, after resolving his difficulties, he would work all the harder and more diligently. I am so deeply obligated to the Chief, as you well know. And besides, I am responsible for my parents and sister. I am in a

tough bind but I'll work myself back out of it. Please do not make it more difficult than it already is. I beg you to speak up for me in the office! No one likes traveling salesmen, I know. They think we make a slew of money and lead charmed lives. There's no particular reason for them to further examine this prejudice. But you, sir, you have a better perspective than the rest of the office, an even better perspective, in all confidence, than the Chief himself, who, in his capacity as employer, allows his opinion to be easily swayed against an employee. You know very well that a traveling salesman, out of the office for almost the entire year, can easily fall prey to gossip, coincidences, and unfounded grievances against which he cannot possibly defend himself because he almost never hears about them except when returning home from an exhausting trip; he personally suffers the grim consequences, the causes of which he can no longer determine. Sir, do not leave without giving me a word to show that you think me at least partially right!"

But with Gregor's first words the head clerk had already turned away and with gaping lips simply looked back over his twitching shoulder at Gregor. And during Gregor's speech he did not stand

still for a moment but crept step-by-step to the door, his eyes never leaving Gregor, as if obeying some secret injunction to leave the room. He was already in the foyer, and from the sudden movement with which he took his last step from the living room, one might believe he had just burned the sole of his foot. In the foyer, however, he stretched his right hand far out toward the stairs as if some supernatural deliverance were awaiting him there.

Gregor realized that he must on no account let the head clerk leave in this frame of mind or his position in the firm would be seriously jeopardized. The parents did not understand this so well; they had convinced themselves over the years that Gregor was set for life at this firm, and besides, they were so preoccupied with the current problem that they had lost all sense of the future. But Gregor did have this foresight. The head clerk had to be detained, calmed, persuaded, and ultimately won over; the very future of Gregor and his family depended on it. If only the sister had been there! She was perceptive; she had already begun to cry when Gregor was still lying quietly on his back. And the head clerk, that ladies' man, would certainly have let her guide him; she would have closed the

apartment door and assuaged his fears in the foyer. But the sister was not there and Gregor would have to handle the situation himself. And without stopping to think that he still had no idea what powers of movement he had or even to think that very possibly—indeed probably—his words would once again be unintelligible, he let go of the wing of the door and flung himself through the opening; desiring to go toward the head clerk, who was already on the landing and ludicrously clutching the banister with both hands, Gregor instead, while groping for support, fell with a little cry onto his numerous little legs. This had barely happened when, for the first time that morning, he felt a sense of physical well-being: The little legs had firm ground beneath them, he was delighted to note that they were completely under his command, they even strained to carry him off wherever he might desire, and he already believed that the final alleviation of all his grief was imminent. But at that same moment, as he lay there rocking from his restrained movement not far from his mother—in fact just in front of her—she, who had seemed so self-absorbed, suddenly sprang up with arms wide and fingers outstretched, shouting: “Help, for God’s sake, help!” She bent her head down as if to see Gregor better but

instead ran contradictorily and madly backward and, having forgotten that the laden table stood behind her, sat down on it thoughtlessly and hastily, seemingly oblivious to the large overturned coffee pot next to her from which coffee was pouring in a steady stream onto the carpet.

“Mother, Mother,” Gregor said softly, and looked up at her. The head clerk had momentarily slipped his mind and he could not help snapping his jaws in the air at the sight of the flowing coffee. This caused the mother to scream again; she fled from the table and fell into the father’s arms as he rushed to her. But Gregor now had no time to waste on his parents; the head clerk was already on the stairs, with his chin on the banister he was looking back one last time. Gregor broke into a run to be sure to catch him; the head clerk must have suspected this because he leaped down several steps and disappeared; he was still yelling, “Aaahh!” which rang throughout the whole staircase. Unfortunately the head clerk’s flight seemed to totally confuse the father, who until now had remained relatively calm, for instead of going after the head clerk or at least not hindering Gregor’s pursuit, he seized in his right

hand the head clerk’s walking stick (which along with his hat and overcoat had been left behind on a chair) and with his left hand grabbed a large newspaper from the table and, stamping his feet, proceeded to brandish the walking stick and newspaper in order to drive Gregor back into his room. No plea of Gregor’s helped, nor indeed was any plea understood; however humbly he turned his head, the father merely stamped his feet all the more forcefully. Across the room the mother, despite the cool weather, had thrown open a window and was leaning far out of it with her face buried in her hands. A strong draft swept in from the street to the staircase, the window curtains swelled, the newspapers on the table rustled, stray pages fluttered over the floor. The father drove Gregor back relentlessly, hissing like a savage. 5 As Gregor was as yet unpracticed in moving backward, it was very slow going. If only Gregor had been permitted to turn around, he would have been in his room at once, but he was afraid to make the father impatient by this time-consuming rotation, and at any moment the stick in the father’s hand threatened to deal a fatal blow to the back or the head. In the end, however, there remained no other choice, for Gregor observed to his horror that he could not control his

direction when moving backward, and so he began as quickly as possible, which was actually very slowly, to turn himself around. Perhaps the father recognized his good intentions because he did not interfere; instead he occasionally even directed the movement from a distance with the tip of his stick. If only the father would quit that infernal hissing! It made Gregor completely lose his head. He was almost turned all the way around when, distracted by the hissing, he made a mistake and turned back the other way for a stretch. When he successfully ended up headfirst in front of the doorway, it was obvious that his body was too wide to get through as it was. Naturally it did not occur to the father in his present mood to open the other wing of the door to give Gregor a wide enough passage. He was fixed on the idea of getting Gregor back in his room as quickly as possible. And he would never have allowed the elaborate preparations that Gregor needed to pull himself upright and perhaps attempt to go through the door that way. Rather, he drove Gregor forward, as if there were no obstacle, with a considerable amount of noise; it no longer sounded like just one father behind him and now it was really no longer a joke, and Gregor—come what may—thrust himself into the doorway. One side

of his body rose up and he lay at an angle in the doorway, one of his flanks was scraped raw and the white door was stained with ugly blotches, he was soon stuck fast and could not move on his own, the little legs on one side hung trembling in midair and on the other side they were pinned painfully to the floor —when his father gave him a terrific shove from behind and he flew, bleeding profusely, far into the room. The door was slammed shut with the stick, then all was still.

Chapter II

IT WAS TWILIGHT WHEN Gregor awoke from his deep slumber. Even without being disturbed he doubted he would have slept much later, as he felt so well rested, but it seemed to him that a furtive step and a cautious shutting of the foyer door had roused him. The glow of the electric street lamps shone in pale patches on the ceiling and upper parts of the furniture, but where Gregor slept it was dark. Slowly, still groping awkwardly with his antennas, which he was only now learning to appreciate, he pushed himself over to the door to see what had been happening. His left side felt like a

single long unpleasantly taut scar and he actually had to limp on his two rows of legs. One little leg, moreover, had been seriously injured during the course of the morning’s events—it was nearly a miracle that only one had been hurt—and dragged behind him lifelessly.

Only when he reached the door did Gregor discover what had actually tempted him there: the smell of something edible. For there stood a bowl filled with fresh milk in which small slices of white bread were floating. He could have almost laughed for joy, as he was even hungrier than in the morning, and immediately plunged his head, almost up to the eyes, into the milk. But he quickly withdrew it in disappointment; not only was eating difficult on account of his tender left side—and eating had to be a collaboration of the whole heaving body—but he did not care at all for the milk, which was otherwise his favorite drink and surely the reason his sister had set it out for him. In fact, it was almost in revulsion that he turned away from the bowl and crawled back to the middle of the room.

In the living room, as Gregor could see through the crack in the door, the gas was lit; although the father usually liked to read the afternoon paper at this hour in a loud voice to the mother and sometimes to the sister as well, not a sound was heard. Well, perhaps this custom of reading that the sister had told him about and wrote of in her letters had been recently discontinued. But it was so silent everywhere, even though the apartment was certainly not empty. “What a quiet life the family has led,” Gregor said to himself, and felt, as he stared pointedly into the darkness, a great surge of pride that he had been able to provide his parents and his sister such a life and in such a beautiful apartment. But what if all the tranquility, all the comfort, all the contentment were now to come to a horrifying end? So as not to dwell on such thoughts, Gregor started to move and began crawling up and down the room.

Once during the long evening, one of the side doors and then the other was opened a small crack and quickly shut again; someone had apparently had the urge to come in but had then thought better of it. Gregor now stationed himself directly before the living room door, determined to persuade the hesitant visitor to come in or at

least discover who it might be, but the door was not opened again and Gregor waited in vain. That morning, when the doors had been locked, they all wanted to come in; now after he had opened the one door and the others had been opened during the day, no one came and the keys were now on the other side.

It was late into the night before the light went out in the living room, and it was now obvious that the parents and the sister had stayed awake until then, because he could clearly discern that all three were tiptoeing away. Certainly no one would come in to Gregor until morning, therefore he had a long undisturbed time to ponder how best to reorder his life. But the high-ceilinged, spacious room in which he was forced to lie flat on the floor filled him with an unaccountable dread; it was, after all, his own room which he had inhabited for five years, and with an almost involuntary movement—and not without a faint feeling of shame—he scurried under the sofa, where, despite his back being slightly squashed and being unable to raise his head, he felt immediately cozy and only regretted that his body was too wide to fit completely underneath the sofa.

There he stayed the whole night, sometimes dozing but then waking up with a start from hunger pains; sometimes he worried and entertained vague hopes, but it all led him to the same conclusion: For now he must lie low and try, through patience and the greatest consideration, to help his family bear the inconvenience he was bound to cause them in his present condition.

So early in the morning that it was almost still night, Gregor had an opportunity to test the strength of his new resolutions, because the sister, nearly fully dressed, opened the door from the foyer and eagerly peered in. She did not immediately find him, but when she noticed him underneath the sofa—well, he had to be somewhere, he couldn’t have just flown away—she was so startled that, unable to control herself, she slammed the door shut from the outside. But, as if regretting her behavior, she instantly reopened it and tiptoed in as though she were visiting someone seriously ill or even a stranger. Gregor had pushed his head forward to the edge of the sofa and was watching her. Would she notice that he had left the milk untouched not from any lack of hunger and bring something

he liked better? If she did not do so on her own, he would rather starve than bring it to her attention, although he was extremely hard-pressed not to dart out from under the sofa and throw himself at her feet to beg for something good to eat. But the sister immediately and with surprise noticed the bowl, still full except for a little milk that had spilled around it, and promptly picked it up, not with bare hands of course but with a rag, and carried it out. Gregor was exceedingly curious as to what she would bring instead, and he advanced all sorts of theories. But he could never have guessed what in the goodness of her heart the sister actually did. To find out his likes and dislikes, she brought him a wide selection all spread out on an old newspaper. There were old, half-rotten vegetables, bones covered with congealed white sauce from supper the night before, some raisins and almonds, a cheese that Gregor had declared inedible two days before, dry bread, bread with butter, and bread with butter and salt. Beside this she set down the bowl, now presumably reserved for Gregor’s exclusive use, which she had filled with water. And it was out of delicacy, knowing Gregor would not eat in her presence, that she hurriedly removed herself and even turned the key in the lock to indicate to

Gregor that he was free to indulge himself as comfortably as he pleased. Gregor's little legs whizzed toward the food. His wounds must have already been fully healed, he felt no more injury; he marveled at this and thought about when he had cut his finger with a knife over a month ago and how this wound had still bothered him just the day before yesterday. "Have I become less sensitive?" he thought, sucking greedily at the cheese, to which he was initially and primarily drawn before all the other food. With tears of gratitude he quickly devoured, one after the other, the cheese, the vegetables, and the sauce; the fresh food on the other hand did not appeal to him and he even dragged what he did want to eat a bit farther away. He had long finished with everything and lay drowsily on the same spot when the sister, to signify her return, slowly turned the key in the lock. This jerked him into action, as he was dozing, and he rushed back under the sofa. But he truly had to force himself, even for the short time that the sister was in the room, to stay beneath the sofa, because he had bloated slightly from the large meal and he could barely breathe in such strict confinement. In between minor bouts of suffocation, he watched with bulging eyes as the unsuspecting sister swept up not only the

remaining scraps but even what Gregor had not touched, as if they now had no more use, and dumped it all quickly into a bucket that she covered with a wooden lid and carried away. Hardly had she turned her back when Gregor came out from under the sofa, stretched, and puffed himself out.

Gregor was fed twice daily in this way, once in the morning while the parents and the maid still slept, and once after dinner was eaten while the parents napped for a short time and the sister could send the maid on some errand. The parents certainly did not want Gregor to starve, but perhaps it was as much as they could bear to hear about it, perhaps the sister wanted to save them from even the smallest possible discomfort, as they surely had enough to bear.

Gregor had no idea what excuse was used that first morning to put off the doctor and locksmith, because as no one could understand him, no one thought, including the sister, that he could understand them, and so he had to content himself, whenever his sister was in the room, with hearing a sigh now and then or an appeal to the saints. A little time later, when she was a bit more at ease—of

course it was never a question of being completely at ease—Gregor sometimes caught a remark that was meant kindly or at least could be so considered. “Oh, he enjoyed it today,” she said when Gregor had eaten well, or when he had not, which was more frequently the case, she would say almost sadly, “It’s all been left again.” Although Gregor could get no news directly, he overheard a great deal from the neighboring rooms, and as soon as he heard voices he would run over to the corresponding door and press his entire body against it. There was no conversation, especially early on, that did not concern him even if only indirectly. At every meal for two whole days there were discussions about what should be done, but this same theme was also debated between meals, because there were always at least two family members home since no one wanted to be alone in the apartment and it certainly could not be left empty under the circumstances. Furthermore, on the very first day, the cook—it was not entirely clear what and how much she knew of the situation—begged the mother on her knees to be discharged immediately, and when she took her leave a quarter of an hour later, she was tearfully thankful for the dismissal, as if it were the greatest service they had ever conferred upon her, and with no

prompting swore a dreadful oath never to breathe to anyone a word of what had happened.

Now the sister also had to cook, as did the mother, but this was not much trouble, as the family ate almost nothing. Again and again Gregor heard one encouraging another in vain to eat and receiving no answer but: “Thank you, I’ve had enough,” or something very similar. Perhaps they did not drink either. The sister often asked the father whether he would have some beer and kindly offered to procure it herself, and when the father did not reply she suggested that she could send the janitor’s wife to fetch it to offset any hesitation, but then in the end the father answered with a firm “No,” and it was discussed no further.

In the course of the very first day, the father explained the family’s financial position and prospects to both the mother and the sister. Now and then he rose from the table to get some receipt or notebook from the small safe he had managed to rescue from the collapse of his business five years earlier. He could be heard opening the complicated lock, removing the desired document, and closing it again. The father’s explanations were the first

encouraging news Gregor had heard since his captivity. He had been of the opinion that nothing had been salvaged from the father’s business; at least the father had said nothing to the contrary, although Gregor had also never asked him. Gregor’s only concern at that time had been to do whatever he could to have the family forget as quickly as possible the financial misfortune that had plunged them into total despair. And so he began to work with consuming energy and was promoted, almost overnight, from a minor clerk to a traveling salesman with much greater potential to earn money, and his success was soon transformed, by way of commission, into cash that he could then lay on the table before the astonished and delighted family. Those had been happy times and they had never returned, at least not with the same brilliance, even though Gregor later earned enough to meet the expenses of the entire family and did so. They had simply grown used to it, both the family and Gregor; the money was gratefully accepted and gladly given but it no longer brought any particular warmth. Only the sister remained close to Gregor, and it was his secret plan that she, who unlike Gregor greatly loved music and played the violin movingly, should be sent to the Conservatory next year despite the

considerable expense it was sure to incur, which would just have to be met in some other way. During Gregor's short stays in the city, the Conservatory would often come up in conversation with the sister but always as a beautiful dream that could never be realized. The parents were displeased to hear even these innocent allusions, but Gregor had very definite ideas about it and intended to announce his plan on Christmas Eve.

Such were the thoughts, utterly useless in his present condition, that went through his head as he stood listening, glued to the door. Sometimes, from general weariness he could listen no longer and carelessly let his head slump against the door, but he promptly recovered because even the small noise he had made had been heard in the next room and had silenced them all. "What's he up to now?" the father said after a while, obviously turning toward the door, and only then did the interrupted conversation resume.

Gregor was now very thoroughly informed—because the father tended to repeat his explanations, partly because he had not dealt with these matters himself in a long time and partly because the

mother did not always understand the first time—and discovered that despite the disaster a sum, admittedly very small, remained from the old days and had increased slightly in the meantime due to the untouched interest. And besides that, the money Gregor brought home every month—he had kept only a few guilder for himself—had not been entirely depleted and had now accumulated into a small capital sum. Behind the door Gregor nodded his head emphatically, delighted to learn of this unexpected frugality and foresight. Of course he actually could have used this extra money to further pay off the father's debt to the Chief, thus bringing much closer the day he could have rid himself of this job, but doubtless things were better this way, the way his father had arranged them.

However, this money was by no means sufficient to support the family on the interest; the principal might support the family for a year, or two at the most. So it was just a sum that should not be touched, put aside for emergencies, and the money to live on would still need to be earned. Now the father was certainly healthy but an old man who had not worked in five years and could not be expected to do much; during these years, the first leisure time in

his laborious albeit unsuccessful life, he had gained a lot of weight and become quite sluggish as a result. And how should the elderly mother earn a living, when she suffered from asthma and even a walk through the apartment was trying, leaving her gasping for breath every other day on the sofa by an open window? And should the sister work, still a child of seventeen whose life had been so pleasant until now—dressing nicely, sleeping late, helping with the housework, enjoying a few modest amusements, and above all playing the violin? At first, whenever the conversation turned to the need to earn money, Gregor let go of the door and threw himself onto the cool leather sofa nearby, he felt so flushed with shame and grief.

He often lay there through the whole night, not sleeping a wink, just scrabbling on the leather for hours. Or, not shying from the great effort, he would push a chair over to the window, climb up to the sill, and lean, propped up on the chair, against the windowpanes, evidently in some vague remembrance of the freedom he had once found in gazing out. For actually he now saw things just a short distance away becoming dimmer each day; he

could no longer make out the hospital opposite, whose sight he used to curse for having seen it all too often, and if he were not so certain that he lived on the quiet but decidedly urban Charlotte Street, he could have believed that he was gazing out the window at a barren wasteland where the ashen sky merged indistinguishably with the gray earth. The observant sister had needed to notice the chair standing by the window only twice; whenever she straightened the room after that, she carefully replaced the chair at the window and now even left the inner casements open.

If only Gregor had been able to speak with the sister and thank her for everything she was obliged to do for him, he could have borne her ministrations more easily; as it was they oppressed him. The sister certainly tried to lessen the general awkwardness of the situation as much as possible, and as time went by she naturally succeeded more and more, however with the passing time Gregor too saw everything more clearly. Her very entrance was terrible for him. Hardly had she entered when she rushed directly to the window without taking the time to close the door—although she

was usually so careful to shield everyone from the sight of Gregor's room—tore the window open with hasty hands as if almost suffocating, and stayed there awhile, even when it was bitterly cold, breathing deeply. This bustle and racket of hers tortured Gregor twice a day, and he lay the entire time quaking under the sofa, knowing very well that she would have spared him this if it were at all possible to remain in a room with Gregor with the window shut.

Once, approximately a month after Gregor's transformation, when there was no reason for the sister to be especially alarmed at his appearance, she came a little earlier than usual and caught Gregor perfectly still, gazing out the window, thus giving him a particularly frightful aspect. It would not have surprised Gregor if she had not come in, as his position prevented her from immediately opening the window, but not only did she not enter, she actually jumped back and shut the door; a stranger could easily have thought Gregor had been lying in wait for her and meant to bite her. Gregor naturally hid himself at once under the sofa but had to wait until noon for the sister's return, and then she seemed much more uneasy than usual. He concluded that the sight of him was still

repulsive to her and was bound to remain repulsive, and that she must have exercised great self-control not to take flight at the sight of even the smallest portion of his body protruding from under the couch. To spare her from even these glimpses, he dragged the sheet to the sofa on his back one day—this required four hours' work—and laid it in such a way as to conceal himself entirely, so the sister could not see him even if she stooped down. If she did not find the sheet necessary, she certainly could have removed it, because it was clear enough that Gregor could not possibly be pleased by his total confinement, but she left the sheet as it was, and Gregor imagined he caught a grateful look once when he cautiously raised the sheet a little with his head to see how the sister was taking the new arrangement.

During the first two weeks, the parents could not bring themselves to enter his room and he often heard them praising the efforts of the sister, whereas earlier they had frequently been annoyed with her because she appeared to them to be a somewhat useless girl. Now, however, both the father and the mother often waited outside Gregor's room while the sister cleaned up inside, and as soon as

she stepped out she had to report fully to them on exactly how the room looked, what Gregor had eaten, how he had behaved this time, and whether perhaps some slight improvement was noticeable. Incidentally, the mother wanted to visit Gregor relatively soon but the father and the sister put her off with logical arguments that Gregor listened to very attentively and approved of wholeheartedly. But later she had to be held back by force, and when she cried out: “Let me go to Gregor, he’s my unfortunate son! Can’t you understand that I must go to him?” Gregor then thought that it would perhaps be beneficial if the mother did come in, not every day of course, but maybe once a week; she understood everything much better than the sister, who for all her pluck was still just a child and may have ultimately undertaken such a difficult task out of childish recklessness.

Gregor’s desire to see the mother was soon fulfilled. During the daytime Gregor did not want to show himself at the window, if only out of consideration for his parents, but he could not crawl around very far in the few square meters of floor, nor could he bear to lie still even at night, and eating gave him scant pleasure, so as a

distraction he acquired the habit of crawling crisscross over the walls and ceiling. He especially liked hanging from the ceiling; it was entirely different from lying on the floor, he could breathe more freely and a mild tingling ran through his body, and in the near joyful oblivion in which Gregor found himself up there he could, to his own surprise, lose hold and plunge to the floor. But naturally he now had much more control over his body than before and was not harmed by even so great a fall. The sister immediately noticed Gregor's newfound entertainment—after all he did leave behind the sticky traces of his crawling here and there—and she got it into her head to allow Gregor the widest crawling space possible by the removal of the furniture that hindered him, namely the bureau and the desk. She was not, however, able to do this alone; she did not dare ask for the father's help and the maid would certainly not help her because, although she, a girl of about sixteen, had had the courage to stay on after the cook's departure, she had asked for the privilege of keeping the kitchen door locked at all times and opening it only upon specific requests. This left the sister no choice but to ask the mother at a time when the father was out. The mother did come with exclamations of excited delight

but fell silent outside the door to Gregor’s room. Naturally the sister first checked to see that everything was in order in the room and only then admitted the mother. Gregor had very hastily pulled the sheet down lower in tighter folds so that it really looked like a sheet casually thrown over the couch. He refrained from peeking out from under the sheet this time, renouncing this very first sight of his mother, and was only glad she had come at all. “Come in, you can’t see him,” said the sister, evidently leading the mother by the hand. Gregor now heard the two frail women pushing the extremely heavy old bureau from its place and the sister taking on most of the work, not heeding the warnings of the mother, who feared she might overexert herself. It took a very long time. After struggling for a good quarter of an hour, the mother declared that they had better leave the bureau where it was; first, it was just too heavy, they would not be finished before the father’s arrival, and Gregor’s every movement would be hindered with the bureau in the middle of the room, and second, it was not at all certain that removing the furniture was doing Gregor any great service. It seemed to her that the opposite was true: The look of the empty wall was heartrending, and wouldn’t Gregor feel that same way since he had

been used to the furniture for so long and might feel bereft in the empty room. “And doesn’t it look,” concluded the mother very softly, in fact she practically whispered the whole time as if, not knowing Gregor’s precise whereabouts, she did not want him to hear even the sound of her voice, as she was convinced that he could not understand the words, “and doesn’t it look, by removing all the furniture, like we’ve abandoned all hope of his recovery and are callously leaving him completely on his own? I think it would be best if we tried to keep the room exactly as it was before, so that when Gregor comes back to us he can find everything unchanged and forget that much more easily what happened in the meantime.”

Upon hearing the mother’s words, Gregor realized that the lack of any direct human exchange, coupled with the monotony of the family’s life, must have confused his mind; he could not otherwise explain to himself how he could have seriously wished to have his room cleared out. Did he really wish his warm room, comfortably furnished with old family heirlooms, to be transformed into a lair in which he would certainly be able to crawl freely in any direction, but at the price of rapidly and completely forgetting his human

past? He had indeed been so close to forgetting that only the voice of the mother, so long unheard, brought him to his senses. Nothing should be removed, everything must stay as it was, he could not do without the beneficial influence of the furniture on his state of mind, and if the furniture impeded his senseless crawling about, it was not a loss but a great boon.

Unfortunately, however, the sister thought differently; she had grown accustomed, not entirely without reason, to being especially expert in any discussion with her parents concerning Gregor, and so now the mother’s advice was grounds enough for her to insist on removing not only the bureau and desk, as she had originally planned, but also the rest of the furniture, with the exception of the indispensable sofa. This determination of course did not arise only from childish defiance and the self-confidence she had recently and so unexpectedly developed at such a cost; she had in fact observed that Gregor needed more room to crawl, and as far as one could see, he never used the furniture. Her determination may also have arisen from the romantic enthusiasm of girls her age that seeks expression at every opportunity and tempted Grete to overplay the

horror of Gregor’s predicament in order that she might perform even more heroically on his behalf than previously. For in a room where Gregor alone ruled over the bare walls, no one other than Grete was likely to dare set foot.

And so she refused to be shaken from her resolve by the mother, who seemed extremely anxious and unsure of herself in this room and soon quieted and helped the sister, to the best of her abilities, to push the bureau outside. Now, in a pinch Gregor could do without the bureau but the desk must absolutely stay. And no sooner had the women left the room, grunting and heaving with the bureau, than Gregor poked his head out from under the sofa to ascertain how he could cautiously and tactfully intervene. But as luck would have it, it was the mother who returned first while Grete was still in the next room with her arms around the bureau, rocking it and trying to shift it on her own but naturally not budging it an inch. The mother, however, was unaccustomed to Gregor’s appearance and it might have sickened her; so Gregor panicked and scuttled back to the other end of the sofa, but he could not prevent the sheet from stirring a little in front. This was enough to

catch the mother’s eye. She froze, stood still for a beat, then retreated to Grete.

Although Gregor said over and over to himself that nothing out of the ordinary was happening, that some furniture was just being moved around, he soon had to concede that the coming and going of the women, their soft exclamations, the scraping of the furniture along the floor were all like a roaring rising up and pressing in around him, and no matter how he tucked in his head and legs and flattened his body to the floor, he was forced to admit that he could not stand the ruckus much longer. They were clearing out his room, taking from him everything that he loved; they had already dragged out the bureau, which contained the fretsaw and other tools, and now they were prying loose the firmly entrenched desk, at which he had done his assignments during business school, high school, and even as far back as elementary school—there was now no longer any time to contemplate the finer intentions of the two women, whose existence he had actually almost forgotten, because from sheer exhaustion they were struggling in silence and only the heavy shuffling of their feet could be heard.

And so he broke out—the women were in the next room, leaning on the desk to catch their breath—and ran in four different directions, not knowing what to save first; then he saw on the otherwise barren wall opposite him the picture of the lady swathed in furs and quickly scrambled up and pressed himself against the glass, a surface he could stick to and that soothed his heated belly. At the very least this picture, which Gregor now completely concealed, would be removed by no one. He twisted his head around to the living room door to observe the women's return.

They had not taken much of a break and were already headed back; Grete had put an arm around the mother and was almost carrying her. "So what should we take now?" said Grete, looking around. And then her eyes met Gregor's gaze from the wall. It was probably due only to the presence of the mother that she maintained her composure, bent her head down to the mother to keep her from looking up, and said, rather shakily and without thinking: "Come, why don't we go back to the living room for a moment?" It was clear to Gregor that she intended to get the mother to safety and then chase him down from the wall. Well, just let her try! He

cleaved to his picture and would not relinquish it. He would rather fly in Grete’s face.

But Grete’s words had quite unnerved the mother; she took a step to the side, took in the huge brown splotch on the flowered wallpaper, and, before realizing what she saw was actually Gregor, screamed in a loud, harsh voice: “Oh God! Oh God!” and collapsed, arms, outflung in total abandon, onto the sofa and did not move. “Gregor, you!” yelled the sister, glaring fiercely and raising her fist. These were her first direct words to him since the metamorphosis. She ran to the next room for some kind of aromatic spirits to revive the mother from her faint; Gregor wanted to help too—there was time enough to save the picture—but he was stuck fast to the glass and had to wrench himself free, then he also ran into the next room, as if to offer advice as he used to, but had to stand idly behind her once there while she was rummaging among the various bottles; she was freshly shocked when she turned around, one of the vials fell to the floor and shattered, a splinter of glass sliced Gregor’s face and a corrosive medicine splashed around him; Grete, without further delay, grabbed as many vials as she could

hold, ran with them to her mother, and kicked shut the door. Gregor was now cut off from the mother, who might be near death because of him; he could not open the door for fear of frightening away the sister, who had to stay with the mother; there was nothing to do but wait, and plagued with worry and self-reproach he began to crawl, to crawl all over, over everything, walls, furniture, ceiling, and finally fell in despair, when the whole room was spinning, onto the middle of the large table.

A little while passed, Gregor still lay prostrate and everything was quiet; perhaps this was a good sign. Then the doorbell rang; the maid was naturally locked in the kitchen so Grete had to answer it. It was the father. “What’s happened?” were his first words; Grete’s appearance must have told all. Grete answered in a muffled voice, her face obviously thrust against the father’s chest: “Mother fainted, but she’s better now; Gregor’s broken out.” “Just as I expected,” said the father. “I keep telling you, but you women won’t listen.” It was clear to Gregor that the father had misinterpreted Grete’s all too brief statement and assumed Gregor was guilty of some kind of violence. Gregor now had to try to

placate the father, for he had neither the time nor the means for an explanation. And so Gregor flew to the door of his room, crouching against it, to show his father as soon as he came in from the foyer that he had every intention of returning at once to his room and that it was not necessary to drive him back; if only someone would open the door, he would immediately disappear.

But the father was in no mood to make such fine distinctions. “Ah!” he cried as soon as he entered, in a tone both furious and exultant. Gregor drew his head back from the door and raised it toward the father. He had not at all pictured his father like this as he was standing there now; admittedly he had been too preoccupied of late with his newly discovered crawling to concern himself about what was going on in the household, and he really should have been prepared for some changes. And yet, and yet could this indeed still be the father? The same man who used to lie wearily buried in bed when Gregor left for a business trip; who welcomed his return in the evening by merely raising his arms to show his joy, not being quite able to get up, and reclining in an armchair in his robe; who, during the rare family walks a few Sundays a year and on the

highest holidays, shuffled laboriously between Gregor and the mother, always moving a bit slower than their already slowed pace, bundled in his old overcoat and carefully plodding forward by meticulously placing his cane; and who, when he wanted to say something, nearly always stood still and gathered everyone around him? 6 Now, however, he held himself erect, dressed in a tight blue uniform with gold buttons, like that of a bank messenger; his heavy double chin bulged over the high stiff collar of his jacket; from under the bushy eyebrows his alert black eyes flashed penetratingly; his previously disheveled white hair was combed flat, exactingly parted and gleaming. He tossed his cap, on which there was a gold monogram, very possibly a bank’s, clear across the room in an arc and onto the sofa, and with his hands in his pockets and the tails of his long uniform jacket thrown back, he went after Gregor with a grimly set face. He probably did not know what he himself intended to do, nevertheless he lifted his feet unusually high and Gregor was astonished at the gigantic size of his boot soles. But Gregor did not dwell on this; he had known from the very first day of his new life that the father considered only the strictest measures appropriate when dealing with him. And so he ran from

the father, stopping only when the father stood still, and scurried away again as soon as the father moved. In this way they circled the room several times without anything decisive happening; in fact they proceeded so slowly it did not look like a chase. With this in mind Gregor kept to the floor for the moment, especially since he feared the father might view an escape to the walls or ceiling as a particularly malevolent act. At the same time Gregor had to admit that he could not keep up with this running for long, because for every step the father took Gregor had to execute a countless number of maneuvers. He was already short of breath, as his lungs had never been all that reliable in his previous life. He staggered along, his eyes barely open, trying to focus all his energy on running; in this daze he could not think of anything to do but run, and had already almost forgotten that the walls were available to him, although in this room they were blocked by elaborately carved furniture, thorny with points and notches—suddenly something that had been lightly tossed almost hit him, but landed next to him and rolled in front of him. It was an apple, 7 and a second instantly flew in his direction. Gregor froze in terror; further running was useless, for the father was determined to bombard him. He had filled his

pockets from the bowl on the sideboard and was now throwing apple after apple, taking no more than general momentary aim. These small red apples rolled around the floor as if electrified and collided with each other. One weakly lobbed apple grazed Gregor's back and harmlessly slid off. But another, pitched directly after it, actually lodged itself in Gregor's back; Gregor tried to drag himself away, as if this shockingly unbelievable pain would ease with a change in position, but he felt nailed to the spot and stretched out, all his senses in complete confusion. And it was with his last conscious sight that he saw the door of his room burst open and in front of the screaming sister the mother tearing out in her chemise, because when she fainted the sister had undressed her to let her breathe more freely. He saw the mother run to the father, stumbling over her loosened petticoats as they slipped to the floor one by one, and press herself against him, uniting them in her embrace—now Gregor's vision failed him—and with her arms flung around his neck, she begged the father to spare Gregor's life.

Chapter III

GREGOR’S SERIOUS INJURY, FROM which he suffered for almost a month —the apple remained embedded in his flesh as a visible souvenir because no one had the courage to remove it—served to remind even the father that Gregor, despite his now pathetic and repulsive shape, was a member of the family who could not be treated as an enemy; on the contrary, in accordance with family duty they were required to quell their aversion and tolerate him, but only tolerate.

And now, although Gregor had lost some mobility, most likely permanently due to his injury, and traversing his room now took many long minutes like an old invalid—crawling above floor level was out of the question—he was granted, in his mind, entirely satisfactory compensation for this deterioration of his condition: toward evening every day the living room door, which he got used to watching intently for an hour or two beforehand, was opened, so that lying in the darkness of his room and unseen from the living room, he could view the whole family at the brightly lit table and could listen to their conversation more or less with their consent, completely unlike his prior eavesdropping.

Of course there no longer were the lively conversations of earlier times that Gregor would wistfully recall whenever he'd had to sink down into the damp bedding of some small hotel room. Now it was mostly very subdued. The father fell asleep in his armchair soon after supper, and the mother and the sister would caution each other to keep still; the mother, bent over toward the light, sewed delicate lingerie for an apparel shop; the sister, who had taken a job as a salesgirl, was studying shorthand and French in the hope of attaining a better position in the future. The father sometimes woke up and, as if he were not aware he had been sleeping, would say to the mother: "How long you're sewing again today!" and instantly fall back asleep while mother and sister exchanged a tired smile.

Out of some absurd obstinacy, the father refused to take off his messenger's uniform even in the house, and while the dressing gown hung uselessly on the clothes hook, the father sat fully dressed in his chair, as if he were ever ready for duty and awaited, even here, his superior's call. As a result the uniform, which was not new to begin with, became more and more seedy despite all the

efforts of the mother and sister, and Gregor often spent whole evenings staring at this garment, covered with greasy stains and gleaming, constantly polished gold buttons, in which the father slept awkwardly but very peacefully.

As soon as the clock struck ten, the mother tried to rouse the father with gentle words and then persuade him to go to bed, for he simply was not getting any proper rest where he was, something he sorely needed since he had to go on duty at six. But, with this stubbornness that he had acquired since becoming a bank messenger, he always insisted on staying longer at the table even though he nodded off regularly, and it was then a monumental task to coax him into exchanging the chair for the bed. However much the mother and sister prodded him with admonishments, he would go on shaking his head slowly with his eyes closed for another quarter of an hour and refuse to get up. The mother plucked at his sleeve, cajoling softly in his ear, and the sister left her lessons to help the mother, all to no avail. The father only ensconced himself farther in the chair. Not until the two women pulled him up under the arms would he open his eyes and look back and forth from the

mother to the sister, with the customary remark: “What a life. This is the rest of my old age.” And supported by the two women, he rose haltingly to his feet as if he himself were his greatest burden and allowed the women to steer him to the door, where he shrugged them off and labored on alone, while the mother dropped her sewing and the sister her pen to run after him and aid him further.

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Who in this overworked and exhausted family had time to fuss over Gregor more than was absolutely necessary? The household was even further reduced; the maid was dismissed after all and a huge bony charwoman with white hair flapping around her head came mornings and evenings to see to the heaviest chores; the mother took care of everything else on top of her copious sewing. Even various pieces of family jewelry, which the mother and sister used to joyously display at parties and celebrations, had to be sold, as Gregor learned from a discussion of the obtained prices one evening. However, their most persistent lament was that they could not leave this apartment, much too large for their present needs,

because it was inconceivable how Gregor was to be moved. But Gregor fully comprehended that it was not only consideration for him that prevented a move, for he could easily have been transported in a suitable crate with a few airholes; what truly hindered them was an utter hopelessness and the belief that a plight had befallen them unlike any other that had been visited upon their friends or relatives. They carried out the world's demands on poor people to the extreme: The father fetched breakfast for the minor bank clerks, the mother sacrificed herself to the underwear of strangers, the sister ran to and fro behind the counter at customers' beck and call, but beyond this the family had no more strength. And the wound in Gregor's back began to hurt anew whenever the mother and sister, after putting the father to bed, returned to the table, left their work idle, drew close to each other, and sat cheek to cheek, and whenever the mother, pointing toward Gregor's room, now said: "Go shut that door, Grete," and Gregor was in darkness again while next door the women mingled their tears or stared dry-eyed at the table.

Gregor spent the days and nights almost entirely without sleep. Sometimes he mulled over the idea that the next time the door opened he would take control of the family affairs as he had done in the past; these musings led him once more after such a long interval to conjure up the figures of the boss, the head clerk, the salesmen, the apprentices, the dullard of an office messenger, two or three friends from other firms, a sweet and fleeting memory of a chambermaid in one of the rural hotels, a cashier in a milliner’s shop whom he had wooed earnestly but too slowly—they all appeared mixed up with strangers or nearly forgotten people, but instead of helping him and his family they were each and every one unapproachable, and he was relieved when they evaporated. Then other times he could not be bothered to worry about his family, he was filled with rage at their miserable treatment of him, and even though he could not imagine anything that might spark his appetite he still devised plans to raid the pantry and, even if he was not hungry, get the food due him. No longer concerning herself about what Gregor might particularly care for, the sister hastily shoved any old food through the door to Gregor’s room with her foot, both morning and noon before she raced to work, and in the evening

cleared it all out with one sweep of the broom, indifferent to whether the food had only been tasted or—as was most frequently the case—left completely untouched. The cleaning of his room, which she now always did in the evening, could not have been more cursory. Grimy dirt streaked the walls, layers of dust and filth had settled everywhere. At first, whenever the sister came in, he would station himself in corners particularly offensive in this respect as if to impart some reproach. But he could have waited there for weeks without the sister showing any improvement; she could see the dirt just as well as he, but she had simply made up her mind to leave it there. At the same time, with a testiness that was new to her and had in fact overtaken the whole family, she made certain that this tidying remained in her sole domain. The mother once subjected Gregor's room to thorough cleaning that was effected only after many buckets of water—all this dampness sickened Gregor of course, and he lay sprawled on the sofa, embittered and immobile—but the mother's punishment was not far off. Because as soon as the sister noticed the change in Gregor's room that evening, she ran into the living room deeply insulted and despite the mother's hands, raised imploringly, burst into a fit of tears while the

astonished parents—the father was naturally shocked out of his chair—looked on helplessly. Then they quickly started in; the father admonished the mother to his right for not having left the cleaning of Gregor’s room to the sister and shouted at the sister to his left that she was never again allowed to clean Gregor’s room; meanwhile the mother tried to drag the overexcited father to the bedroom, the sister shaking with sobs beat her small fists on the table, and Gregor hissed furiously because no one had thought to close his door and spare him this racket and spectacle.

But even if the sister, worn out by her job, ceased to tend to him as she used to, there was no need for the mother’s intervention or for Gregor to be at all neglected. For now there was the charwoman. This old widow, who must have weathered the worst in her long life with the help of her sturdy bone structure, was not particularly disgusted by Gregor. Without being truly nosy, she happened to open the door to Gregor’s room one day and, at the sight of Gregor —who was completely caught off guard and, although no one chased him, began running back and forth—she merely stood still, her arms folded over her middle, in amazement. Since then she

never failed to briefly open the door a crack every morning and evening to look in on Gregor. Initially she would also call him over to her with words she probably considered friendly, like “Come on over, you old dung beetle!” 8 or “Just look at the old dung beetle!” Gregor did not respond to these overtures but remained in his place as if the door had never been opened. If only they had ordered this charwoman to clean his room every day instead of allowing her to uselessly barge in on him whenever the whim seized her! Early one morning—a heavy rain, maybe a sign of the coming spring, was pelting the windowpanes—Gregor was so exasperated when the charwoman started up again with her sayings that he turned toward her as if to attack, albeit decrepitly and slowly. Instead of being frightened, however, the charwoman simply raised a chair that was close to the door and stood there with her mouth wide open; it was clearly her intention to shut her mouth only when the chair was smashed on Gregor’s back. “So you’re not coming any closer?” she inquired when Gregor turned back around, and calmly put the chair back down in the corner.

Gregor now ate next to nothing. Only when by chance he passed the food set out for him would he take a bite just for fun, hold it in his mouth for hours, and mostly spit it back out. At first he thought he was mourning the state of his room and that this kept him from eating, but he soon grew accustomed to precisely these changes. It had become habit to put anything that had no other place in the house in this room, and these things now amounted to a lot because a room in the house had been let to three gentlemen boarders. 9 These dour men—all three had full beards, as Gregor ascertained once through a crack in the door—were passionate about order, not only in their room but, since they were boarding there, throughout the whole household, especially the kitchen. They could not abide useless, let alone dirty, junk. Besides, they had for the most part brought their own household goods with them. For this reason many things had become superfluous, and while they had no commercial worth they also could not be thrown away. All these things ended up in Gregor’s room. This included the ash can and the rubbish bin from the kitchen. Anything deemed useless for now was hastily hurled into Gregor’s room by the charwoman; Gregor was usually lucky enough to see just the object in question and the

hand that held it. Perhaps the charwoman intended to collect these things as time and opportunity afforded, or to throw everything out together, but in fact they lay wherever they happened to land unless Gregor waded through the junk pile and set it in motion, at first out of necessity because there was no other free space to crawl but later with increasing pleasure, though after these forays he lay still for hours, achingly tired and miserable.

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Since the boarders sometimes took their evening meal in the common living room as well, the living room door stayed shut certain evenings, yet Gregor was easily reconciled to the door’s closing: On many evenings it was opened he had not taken advantage of it but, without the family noticing it, had lain in the darkest corner of his room. One time, however, the charwoman had left the living room door slightly ajar and it stayed open, even when the boarders entered in the evening and the lamp was lit. They sat at the head of the table where the father, mother, and Gregor had sat in the old days; they unfolded their napkins and took knife and fork in hand. The mother at once appeared in the doorway with a

platter of meat and directly behind her was the sister with a heaping dish of potatoes. Thick plumes of steam rose from the food. The boarders bent over the dishes as if to examine them before eating; in fact the one in the middle, seemingly regarded as an authority by the other two, cut into a piece of meat still on the platter, evidently to determine whether it was tender enough or needed to be sent back to the kitchen. He was satisfied and mother and sister, who were anxiously watching, released their breath and began to smile.

The family itself ate in the kitchen. Nevertheless the father came into the living room before retiring to the kitchen, bowed deeply, hat in hand, and made the rounds of the table. The boarders stood up as one and mumbled something into their beards. When they were alone again they ate in virtual silence. It seemed odd to Gregor that out of the myriad noises from the meal, he could always distinguish the mashing teeth, as if to indicate to Gregor that teeth were needed in order to eat and even the best of toothless jaws could do nothing. “I’m hungry enough,” said Gregor

to himself mournfully, “but not for these things. How these boarders stuff themselves and here I am starving to death!”

On this very evening—Gregor could not remember having heard the violin all this time—the sound of the violin came from the kitchen. The boarders had already finished their supper, the middle one had taken out a newspaper and distributed a sheet each to the two others, and they were now leaning back, reading and smoking. When the violin began playing they all looked up, got to their feet, and tiptoed to the foyer door, where they huddled together. They must have been heard from the kitchen because the father called out: “Are the gentlemen disturbed by the violin playing? It can be stopped at once.” “On the contrary,” said the middle gentleman, “wouldn’t the young lady care to come in here with us and play where it is more spacious and comfortable?” “Oh, certainly,” cried the father, as though he were the violinist. The boarders retreated to the room and waited. Soon the father entered with the music stand, the mother with the music, and the sister with the violin. The sister calmly prepared everything to start playing; the parents, who had never before let a room and were consequently excessively

polite to the boarders, did not dare to sit in their own chairs; the father leaned against the door with his right hand tucked between two buttons of his fastened uniform jacket; the mother, however, was offered a chair by one of the gentlemen and sat down where he had chanced to put it, off in a corner.

The sister began to play; the mother and father on either side of her attentively followed the movement of her hands. Gregor, seduced by the playing, had ventured farther forward and his head was already in the living room. His growing lack of concern for the others hardly surprised him, whereas previously he had prided himself on being considerate. And yet now he had more reason than ever to stay hidden: He was coated with the dust that blanketed his room and blew around at the slightest movement, bits of fluff, hair, and food stuck to his back and trailed from his sides; he was so deeply indifferent that he would not turn over and scrape his back clean against the carpet as he once did several times a day. And despite his condition, he was not ashamed to inch farther onto the immaculate living room floor.

No one, to be sure, paid him any mind. The family was completely absorbed by the violin playing; the boarders on the other hand had at first stood with their hands in their pockets so close behind the sister that they could all have read the music, which must have irritated her, but they soon withdrew to the window and stayed there with lowered heads and half-heard grumblings while the father eyed them nervously. Indeed it was more than obvious that their hopes of hearing the violin played well or entertainingly were disappointed, that they had had enough of the recital and were only suffering through this disturbance of their peace out of politeness. In particular, the manner in which they blew their clouds of cigar smoke to the ceiling through their mouths and noses displayed severe aggravation. And yet the sister played so beautifully. Her face was tilted to one side and she followed the notes with soulful and probing eyes. Gregor advanced a little, keeping his eyes low so that they might possibly meet hers. Was he a beast if music could move him so? He felt as though the path to his unknown hungers was being cleared. He was grimly determined to reach the sister and tug on her skirt to suggest that she take her violin and come into his room, for no one here was as worthy of her playing as he

would be. He would never let her leave his room, at least as long as he lived; for the first time, his horrifying appearance would work to his advantage: He would stand guard at all the doors simultaneously, hissing at the attackers; the sister, however, would not be forcibly detained but would stay with him of her own free will. She would sit beside him on the sofa, she would lean down and listen as he confided how he had intended to send her to the Conservatory and how, if misfortune had not interfered, he would have announced this plan to everyone last Christmas—had Christmas really passed already?—and brooked no argument. After this declaration the sister would burst into emotional tears and Gregor would raise himself to her shoulder and kiss her neck, which she kept bare since she started working, wearing no ribbon or collar.

“Herr Samsa!” yelled the middle man to the father, and without wasting another word pointed his index finger at Gregor, who was slowly crawling forward. The violin stopped abruptly, and the middle boarder first smiled at his friends, shaking his head, and then looked at Gregor again. Rather than drive Gregor out, the

father seemed to consider it more urgent to pacify the boarders, although they were not upset in the least and appeared to be more entertained by Gregor than the violin playing. The father rushed to them and tried to herd them back to their room with his outstretched arms while at the same time blocking their view of Gregor with his body. They now became a bit annoyed, but it was not clear whether the father's behavior was to blame or whether the realization was dawning on them that they had unwittingly had a neighbor like Gregor. They demanded explanations from the father, they raised their arms at him and nervously yanked their beards, then they very reluctantly backed away toward their room. In the meantime the sister woke up from the bewildered state she had fallen into after the sudden interruption of her music; after she listlessly dangled the violin and bow awhile in her slack hands and gazed at the music as though she were still playing, she pulled herself together, put the instrument in the mother's lap (the mother was still seated, gasping asthmatically for breath), and ran into the next room, which the boarders were rapidly nearing under the father's pressure. One could see blankets and pillows fly in the air around the bed and arrange themselves under the sister's practiced

hands. Before the men even reached the room she had finished making the beds and skipped out. Once again the father seemed so overpowered by his own obstinacy that he had forgotten the very least courtesy due his tenants. He just kept pushing and pushing them up to the very door of the room, where the middle boarder brought him to a halt by thunderously stamping down his foot. “I hereby declare,” he said, raising his hand and looking around for the mother and sister, “that in view of the revolting conditions prevailing in this household and family”—here he promptly spat on the floor—“I give immediate notice. Naturally I will not pay a cent for the days I have already spent here; on the contrary I shall seriously consider pursuing some legal claim against you that—believe me—will be quite easy to substantiate.” He stopped and stared directly before him as though awaiting something. Sure enough, his two friends jumped in with the words: “We too give our notice.” Thereupon he grabbed the door handle and banged shut the door.

The father staggered and groped for his chair, which he collapsed into; it looked like he was stretching out for his usual evening nap,

but the seemingly uncontrollable bobbing of his head revealed that he was anything but asleep. All this time Gregor had lain quietly where the boarders had first spied him. The disappointment at his plan’s failure and perhaps also the weakness caused by his persistent hunger kept him firmly rooted to the spot. He feared, with a fair degree of certainty, that in the next moment he would bare the brunt of the whole disaster, and so he waited. He did not stir, even when the violin slipped from the mother’s shaky fingers and fell from her lap with a reverberating twang.

“My dear parents,” said the sister, pounding the table with her hand by way of introduction, “things can’t go on like this. Maybe you don’t realize it, but I do. I refuse to pronounce my brother’s name in front of this monstrosity, and so I say: We have to try to get rid of it. We’ve done everything humanly possible to care for it and tolerate it; I don’t believe anyone could reproach us.”

“She’s absolutely right,” the father said to himself. The mother, who was still struggling to catch her breath and had a wild look in her eyes, began to cough hollowly into her hand.

The sister rushed to the mother and cradled her forehead. The father's thoughts seemed to have cleared in the aftermath of the sister's words; he sat up straight, played with the cap of his uniform among the dishes that still lay on the table from the boarders' supper, and from time to time glanced over at Gregor's inert form.

"We have to try to get rid of it," said the sister, addressing only the father because the mother could hear nothing over her coughing. "It'll kill you both, I can see that coming. We all work too hard to come home to this interminable torture. And I can't stand it anymore." And she began sobbing so violently that her tears coursed down onto the mother's face, where she mechanically wiped them away.

"Oh, child," said the father compassionately and with apparent understanding, "what can we do?"

The sister just shrugged her shoulders, displaying the helplessness that had overtaken her during her crying jag in stark contrast to her former self-confidence.

“If only he could understand us,” the father said, almost as a question; the sister, still sobbing, vehemently waved her hand to show how unthinkable it was.

“If only he could understand us,” repeated the father, closing his eyes to absorb the sister’s conviction that this was impossible, “then we might be able to come to some sort of agreement with him. But as it is—”

“It has to go,” the sister cried, “that’s the only way, Father. You have to try to stop thinking that this is Gregor. Our true misfortune is that we’ve believed it so long. But how can it be Gregor? Because Gregor would have understood long ago that people can’t possibly live with such a creature, and he would have gone away of his own accord. Then we would have no brother, but we could go on living and honor his memory. But instead this creature persecutes us and drives out the boarders; it obviously wants to take over the whole apartment and throw us out into the gutter. Just look, Father,” she suddenly screamed, “he’s at it again!” And in a state of panic that was totally incomprehensible to Gregor—she even abandoned the mother, she literally bolted from the chair as if she would rather

sacrifice the mother than stay in the vicinity of Gregor—she rushed behind the father, who got to his feet only out of agitation from her behavior and half-raised his arms as if to protect her.

But Gregor had no intention of frightening anyone, least of all his sister. He had merely begun to turn around to start the journey back to his room, although it was an alarming operation to watch, since his enfeebled condition forced him to use his head to achieve the complex rotations by alternately lifting it and then banging it down. He paused and looked around him. His good intentions appeared to have been recognized; it had only been a momentary alarm. Now they all watched him in glum silence. The mother lay back in her chair, her legs outstretched but squeezed together and her eyes almost shut from exhaustion; the father and sister sat side by side—her hand around his neck.

“Now maybe I can turn around,” Gregor thought, and resumed his labor. He could not help panting from the effort and had to rest every once in a while. At least he left on his own with no one harassing him. As soon as he had finished turning, he started to crawl straight back. He was astonished by how far away the room

was and could not understand how he had recently and in his pathetic condition so unknowingly traveled that great a distance. He was so intent on crawling rapidly that he barely noticed that not a single word or any interference came from his family. Only when he was already in the doorway did he turn his head—not all the way, for he felt his neck stiffening—and saw that nothing had changed behind him except that the sister had risen. His final gaze fell on the mother, who was now deeply asleep.

He was hardly in his room when the door was shut hastily, then bolted and locked. The sudden noise behind him rattled Gregor so much that the little legs gave way beneath him. It was the sister who had been in such a rush. She had been standing by ready and waiting and had lightly leapt forward before Gregor even heard her coming; “Finally!” she cried to the parents as she turned the key in the lock.

“What now?” Gregor wondered, peering around in the darkness. He soon discovered that he could no longer move at all. This did not particularly puzzle him, rather it seemed unnatural to him that he had actually been able to walk on these skinny little legs. Otherwise

he felt relatively comfortable. Of course his whole body ached, but it seemed to him that the pain was gradually fading and would eventually disappear altogether. He could hardly feel the rotten apple in his back and the enflamed area around it, which were covered over by soft dust. His thoughts, full of tenderness and love, went back to his family. He was even more firmly convinced than his sister, if possible, that he should disappear. He remained in this state of empty and peaceful reflection until the tower clock struck three in the morning. He hung on to see the growing light outside the window. Then his head sank involuntarily to the floor and his last feeble breath streamed from his nostrils.

When the charwoman came early in the morning—from sheer energy and impatience she always slammed all the doors, no matter how many times she had been asked not to, so it was impossible for anyone to sleep peacefully after her arrival—she found nothing unusual during her brief customary visit to Gregor’s room. She thought he was lying motionless on purpose, pretending to sulk; she imbued him with all manner of intelligence. Since she happened to be holding the long broom, she tried to tickle him from

the doorway. When this produced no response she became annoyed and began to jab at Gregor; it was only when her shoves were met with no resistance and moved him from his place that she became alerted. She soon grasped the truth of the matter; her eyes went wide and she gave a low whistle but did not hesitate to tear open the Samsas' bedroom door and yell into the dark: "Come and look at this, it's croaked; it's lying there, dead as a doornail!"

Herr and Frau Samsa sat up in their matrimonial bed, struggling to overcome the shock of the charwoman's announcement before realizing its full import. Then they each clambered quickly out of bed from either side, Herr Samsa wrapped the blanket around his shoulders and Frau Samsa came out in her nightgown, and so attired they stepped into Gregor's room. Meanwhile the living room door also opened, where Grete had slept since the advent of the boarders; she was fully dressed as though she had not slept all night and her wan face seemed to confirm this. "Dead?" said Frau Samsa, and looked up inquiringly at the charwoman, although she could have investigated herself and it was plain enough without examination. "I'd say so," said the charwoman, and to prove it she

pushed Gregor’s corpse well to one side with the broom. Frau Samsa made a move to stop her, but checked it. “Well,” said Herr Samsa, “thanks be to God.” He crossed himself and the three women followed suit. Grete, her eyes never leaving the corpse, said: “Look how thin he was. It’s so long since he’s eaten anything. The food came out just as it was brought in.” Indeed, Gregor’s body was completely flat and dry; this could be truly appreciated for the first time, since it was no longer supported by the little legs and nothing else distracted their gaze.

“Grete, come in with us for a while,” said Frau Samsa, with a sad smile, and Grete traipsed after her parents into their bedroom without looking back at the corpse. The charwoman shut Gregor’s door and opened the window wide. Although it was very early in the morning, there was a mildness in the fresh air. It was, after all, already the end of March.

The three boarders emerged from their room and looked around in astonishment for their breakfast; they had been forgotten. “Where is breakfast?” the middle gentleman gruffly demanded of the charwoman. But she just shushed the men with a finger to the

mouth and silently ushered them into Gregor’s room. They filed into the now fully lit room and circled around Gregor’s corpse, with their hands in the pockets of their rather shabby coats.

Just then the bedroom door opened and Herr Samsa appeared in his uniform with his wife on one arm and his daughter on the other. They were all a little teary-eyed, and from time to time Grete pressed her face against her father’s sleeve.

“Leave my house at once!” pronounced Herr Samsa, and pointed to the door without releasing the women. “Whatever do you mean?” said the mildly disconcerted middle boarder, with a sugary smile. The two other gentlemen stood with their hands held behind their backs, incessantly rubbing them together as if in gleeful anticipation of a terrific row that they were bound to win. “I mean exactly what I said,” answered Herr Samsa, making a beeline for the boarders with his two companions in tow. The middle boarder quietly stood his ground at first, eyeing the floor as if reordering things in his head. “Well then, we’ll be going,” he said, and looked up at Herr Samsa as though in a sudden fit of humility he were seeking fresh approval for this decision. Herr Samsa just nodded

briefly several times with his eyes bulging. Thereupon the gentleman immediately strode into the foyer; his two friends had been standing at attention for a while and now positively chased after him, seemingly fearful that Herr Samsa might reach the foyer before them and cut them off from their leader. In the foyer, all three took their hats from the coatrack, their canes from the umbrella stand, silently bowed, and then left the apartment. In what proved to be unfounded mistrust, Herr Samsa and the two women stepped out onto the landing and, leaning on the banisters, they watched the gentlemen slowly but surely descend the long staircase, disappearing on each floor at a certain turn and then reappearing a moment later; as they dwindled down, the family’s interest in them waned, and when a butcher’s boy cockily carrying a tray on his head swung past them and on up the stairs, Herr Samsa and the women quit the banister and, as if relieved, returned to the apartment.

They decided to spend the day resting and going for a walk; they not only deserved this respite from work, they desperately needed it. So they sat down at the table to write three letters of excuse, 11

Herr Samsa to the bank director, Frau Samsa to her client, and Grete to the shopkeeper. While they were writing, the charwoman came in to announce that she was off, as her morning chores were done. The three scribes merely nodded at first without looking up, but when the charwoman kept hovering they eyed her irritably. “Well?” asked Herr Samsa. The charwoman stood grinning in the doorway as if about to report some great news for the family but would only do so after being properly questioned. The little ostrich feather sitting almost erect on top of her hat, which had annoyed Herr Samsa throughout the whole of her employ, fluttered about in all directions. “Well, what is it then?” queried Frau Samsa, for whom the charwoman had the most respect. “Well,” answered the charwoman, interrupting herself with good- natured chuckling, “well, you don’t have to worry about getting rid of the thing next door. It’s already been taken care of.” Frau Samsa and Grete bowed their heads to the letters as if to resume writing; Herr Samsa, who realized that she was eager to begin describing the details, cut her short with a definitive gesture of his hand. But since she could not tell her story, she remembered that she was in a great hurry, and, obviously insulted, she called out: “So long,

everyone,” then furiously whirled around and slammed out of the apartment with a terrific bang of the door.

“She’ll be dismissed tonight,” said Herr Samsa, receiving no reply from either his wife or daughter, for the charwoman had dismantled their barely maintained composure. They got up, went to the window, and stayed there hugging each other. Herr Samsa turned in his chair and quietly watched them a little while. Then he called: “Come now, come over here. Put the past to rest. And have a little consideration for me too.” The women promptly obeyed him, caressed him, and hurriedly finished their letters.

Then all three left the apartment together, which they had not done in months, and took a trolley to the countryside on the outskirts of town. Their trolley car had no other passengers and was flooded with warm sunshine. Leaning back comfortably in their seats, they discussed their prospects for the future and concluded, on closer inspection, that these were not at all bad; for all three had jobs which, although they had never really questioned each other about this, were entirely satisfactory and seemed to be particularly promising. The greatest immediate amelioration of their

circumstances would easily come to fruition with a change of residence: They wanted to take some place smaller and less expensive but better situated and more efficiently designed than the apartment they had, which had been Gregor’s choice. It occurred almost simultaneously to both Herr and Frau Samsa, while they were conversing and looking at their increasingly vivacious daughter, that despite the recent sorrows that had paled her cheeks, she had blossomed into a pretty and voluptuous young woman. Growing quieter and almost unconsciously communicating through exchanged glances, they thought it was time to find her a good husband. And it was like a confirmation of their new dreams and good intentions that at their journey’s end their daughter jumped to her feet and stretched her young body.